

Excerpt from *Action Plan for High Cholesterol*, by Larry Durstine, PhD
<http://www.humankinetics.com/products/showproduct.cfm?isbn=0736054405>

Action Plan for High Cholesterol

Larry Durstine, PhD

Paperback • 208 Pages

ISBN 0-7360-5440-5

\$17.95 (\$23.95 Cdn)

Copyright 2006 by Human Kinetics Publishers, Inc. Excerpted by permission of Human Kinetics, Champaign, IL. Available in bookstores, by calling 1-800-747-4457, or visiting www.HumanKinetics.com.

Making Successful Lifestyle Changes
From Chapter 4: Setting Goals to Modify Cholesterol

Like most people, you've probably made New Year's resolutions to quit smoking, lose weight, or begin exercising, and perhaps you have even stuck with such resolutions for a while. Too often, however, life gets in the way, and we watch our best intentions fall by the wayside. For most people, making lifestyle changes is not easy. Maintaining change is even harder when you want to make more than one change at once. Scientists have identified five stages of change that most people go through along the way to adopting new behaviors. Being aware of these stages can help you make lifestyle changes. Also know that you can begin making a change at any of these points.

- Precontemplation—Not even thinking about change.
- Contemplation—Giving change a thought now and then, but not acting on it.
- Preparation—Doing the new behavior irregularly.
- Action—Doing the new behavior consistently but for less than six months.
- Maintenance—Maintaining the new behavior for six months or more.

Precontemplation is that stage of the change process where you have not developed a desire to change your behavior in the next six months. A six-month period is used because most people need this amount of time to plan a specific behavior change. People in this stage may even lack awareness about specific behaviors they need to change. On the other hand, some people in this stage are very aware of the consequences of their behavior but they avoid making a change because they have not felt the consequences of not doing so. Finally, you may have tried but failed to make the change and have moved on without making the change.

One way to aid in making the move from the precontemplation stage to the contemplation stage is to increase your awareness of the need for the change. Many different avenues exist for increasing awareness, but mass media is by far the largest influence for increasing awareness. In the contemplation stage you

intend to change a behavior within the next six months. Like the precontemplation stage, the contemplation stage can last about six months. In this stage you are likely aware of the benefits of the behavior change as well as some of the barriers for achieving the desired behavior. Now you should develop a plan for making your change. The first part of this plan is to set both short-term and long-term goals. Short-term goals should be reasonable and attainable, because the achievement of short-term goals helps ensure successful behavior change by increasing self-efficacy and developing your confidence for making desired behavior changes.

Barriers provide reasons for not making a change. They are different for each person, and you need to overcome them in order to make a change. Examples of barriers include the finances associated with making the behavior change, family problems that prohibit the change, and a lack of desire to make the change.

If you face these sorts of barriers, you may need extra help to successfully achieve change. In this case, you should seek encouragement and motivation from others in order to move into the next stage. A health-promotion professional has the ability to help you manipulate your environment so you can make the desired behavior change.

Seeking help from others is an indication that you are ready to go beyond the contemplation stage into the preparation stage. The preparation stage is when you intend to make a change within the next 30 days and have already attempted at least once to make this specific change. It is in this stage that you are most likely to have success in making a change.

The action stage is the time up to six months after the preparation stage. It is where you are most likely to make a sufficient behavior change and reflects consistent, positive performance of a desired behavior pattern. You can usually measure the amount of change you've made by determining or measuring the behavior change. For example, if the behavior change is to abstain from drug use or cigarette smoking, you can determine success by measuring the length of time you've abstained from drug use or smoking. In the case of lowering blood cholesterol, success is having lower blood cholesterol after intervention. If your behavior change is to start an exercise program, a means for determining success is the number of times each week that you exercise. After performing the behavior regularly for six months, you are ready to move into the fifth stage, maintenance.

The maintenance stage can last for several years, hopefully for a lifetime. The behavior being changed is the key factor in determining how long this stage lasts. Once you've developed a lifestyle that will lower your blood cholesterol, you need to maintain this lifestyle for the rest of your life.